



*DOUGLAS COUNTY*  
**HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS RECOMMEND MENINGOCOCCAL VACCINE**

Douglas County has recently experienced an increased incidence of meningococcal infection. To date, during 2010, seven cases of meningococcal disease have been reported to Douglas County Public Health. Five have been in young children, and two in teenagers. In comparison, Oregon's total count is 21 cases reported since the beginning of the year.

"The best way to prevent meningococcal disease is by vaccination," says Dawnelle Marshall, Public Health Division Director. Vaccination is regularly recommended for certain persons, but because of the recent cases, public health officials are strongly encouraging these same groups to review their immunization records and be vaccinated if they haven't already been, sooner rather than later, for direct protection.

Meningococcal vaccine is recommended for:

- ✓ Children and adolescents 11 through 18 years of age;
- ✓ College freshmen living in dormitories;
- ✓ Microbiologists who are routinely exposed to meningococcal bacteria;
- ✓ Military recruits and travelers to certain countries;
- ✓ Anyone who has a damaged spleen, or whose spleen has been removed;
- ✓ Anyone who has terminal complement component deficiency (an immune system disorder)

The meningococcal vaccine is safe, effective and approved by the FDA for persons 2 through 55 years of age. Although the meningococcal vaccine is recommended for all children 11 through 18 years of age, 2008 immunization survey data in Oregon showed only 30% of eligible children received the vaccine.

The vaccine prevents disease from 4 types of meningococcal disease — types A, C, Y, and W135. Because four of the seven confirmed cases in Douglas County have been type C, this has prompted Douglas County Public Health officials to strongly encourage vaccination. Two of the seven confirmed cases have been type B -- there is not a vaccine that protects against type B infection.

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Meningococcal disease is **not** highly contagious. The bacterium is mainly spread from person to person through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions. This can occur through coughing, kissing, and sneezing. Fortunately, meningococcal bacteria are not as contagious as things like the common cold or the flu. Also, the bacteria are not spread by casual contact or by simply breathing the air where a person with meningitis has been.

Symptoms include fever, headache, vomiting, difficulty looking at bright light, confusion, agitation, sleepiness, neck stiffness and/or rash. The disease can progress very quickly, so it is important that patients with a fever plus a stiff neck, severe headache, or new rash seek immediate medical attention. Even when they are treated with antibiotics, 10-15% of these people die. Of those who survive, another 11-19% may have other serious problems with their nervous systems.

Smoking, or being exposed to tobacco smoke from others, has also been associated with getting meningococcal disease.

For more information or vaccination, parents are urged to call their health care provider, the Douglas County Health Public Health or visit <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/diseases/nmenin.shtml>.

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Douglas County Public Health immunization hours are at  
<http://www.co.douglas.or.us/health/PH/immunization.asp>

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